The Lord Jesus in Gethsemane

Friedhelm Runkel · Matthew 26:37-38 · March 29, 2026



Matthew 26:37–38

> 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to
> be sorrowful and deeply depressed. 38 Then he says to them, My soul is
> very sorrowful even unto death; remain here and watch with me.

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The Way to Gethsemane

The Lord Jesus had familiarized His disciples with the events of His betrayal, suffering, and death. Then He set out on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was to be betrayed and arrested. The events at Gethsemane are central to the Passion narrative.

After introducing the remembrance meal, the Lord Jesus sang a hymn of praise to the glory of God with His disciples. He then left the city of Jerusalem with His disciples. Afterward, they went down the slope into the Kidron Valley and into the Garden of Gethsemane. He left eight of His disciples at the entrance to the garden. However, he

led Peter, James, and John a little farther into it. Notably, the scene at Gethsemane highlights the intimacy and gravity of these moments.

The Lord’s Grief and Distress

In the Gospel of Matthew, one reads the moving words: He “began to be grieved and distressed. Then He *said* to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me” (Matthew 26:37–38). Here we have one of the few places in the Gospels where we read something about our Savior’s feelings. “He began …”: this does not mean a passing feeling. Instead, it emphasizes that it marked the beginning of an event characterized by grief and distress. These expressions show the great anguish and burden of our Lord.

The Depth of His Anguish

When the Lord Jesus speaks here of “grief to the point of death,” that naturally also includes His feelings with a view to the impending death. Mark writes that the Lord Jesus began to be “very distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33). One gets the impression that the anguish of the forefeelings of our Lord had reached a point that could not be heightened any further. Even if the cross itself, with all its terrors and torments, still lay before Him, the Savior nevertheless felt in advance, in the deepest way, what would happen to Him hours later. In this, it was not primarily about indescribable physical anguish. Above all, it was about the unsparing judgment of God and death as the wages of sin. All of that stood, so to speak, “tangible” before His “inner eye.” At Gethsemane, this struggle was made visible.

The Agony in Prayer

Luke describes the outward accompanying circumstances of the inner anguish of our Lord. “And when He was in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44). This statement becomes all the more significant when one considers that it was a cold night on which our Savior was betrayed. Hours later, they lit a fire in the courtyard of the high priest to warm themselves—so cold it was (cf. John 18:18). Do the expressions

“agony,” “praying very fervently,” and “sweat, like drops of blood” not show impressively the indescribably deep anguish of our Lord?

The Content of His Prayers

What, then, was the content of His prayers? In Matthew 26:39–44, we find three indications of this:

- “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39).
- “My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless I drink from it, Your will be done” (Matthew 26:42).
- “And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more” (Matthew 26:44).

The First Prayer

The first prayer shows how greatly the Lord Jesus shuddered at this terrible judgment. No one other than He Himself knew better what it would mean to suffer divine judgment over sin. This first prayer makes clear how terrible it was for Him, the pure and sinless One, to have to go into God’s judgment over our sins. And yet—despite all its terror, it was and remained at all times His firm and unshakable resolve to fulfill the will of God. Even if it would bring suffering of the cross and death, His resolve remained the same. Furthermore, Gethsemane was the place where He submitted to God's will most profoundly.

The Second Prayer

The second prayer shows us the Lord Jesus’ full willingness and devotion to the Father. If there was no other way, then He was ready to drink this cup. On an earlier occasion, the Lord Jesus had taught His disciples to pray: “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Was the Lord Jesus aware of the scope of this prayer, with a view to what lay ahead for Him? Yes! Now, when it came to Him Himself, when suffering, pain, judgment, and death stood immediately before Him, His

desire remained unchanged and the same. It was “Your will be done”—even if the fulfillment of this will would mean that God would forsake him and would ultimately also include His death. What obedience, what devotion to God!

The Third Prayer and His Firm Resolve

A third time the Savior prayed; one may well assume that it was the reaffirmation of the second prayer. His resolve was and remained firm: He wanted to fulfill His Father’s will faithfully! In conclusion, Gethsemane stands as a powerful symbol of obedience and anguish.

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